

March 9, 2021

Chairs Flexer and Fox, ranking members Sampson and Mastrofrancesco and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

I am a co-founder and on the Steering Committee of Voter Choice Connecticut, the all-volunteer citizens' movement working to bring Ranked Choice Voting to state and federal elections in Connecticut, although I speak just for myself in this testimony.

I am submitting this testimony in favor of several bills before your committee:

- HB-6578, *AAC Participation in the Electoral Process*, to restore the right to vote for convicted felons who are released on parole, and to codify Automatic Voter Registration, but expanding AVR as I describe below.
- SB-1017, *AAC Election Administration*, which includes making absentee ballot drop boxes permanent and offers the option to apply online for an absentee ballot.
- SB-753, *AAC the Counting of Incarcerated Persons for Purposes of Determining Legislative Districts* to end the practice known as prison gerrymandering.
- SB-1014 *AAC a Municipal Election Monitor for the 2021 Municipal Election and the 2022 State Election* to ensure the integrity of election administration in Bridgeport.

To have a strong and resilient democracy that is truly representative of its citizens, four conditions must be met:

- We must expand the voting franchise to all citizens;
- We must adopt measures that increase voter participation by reducing barriers to voting;
- We must have measures in place to ensure that every vote is counted, that actual threats of fraud and election tampering are prevented, and that our elections are secure from threats foreign and domestic;
- And lastly, we must make the outcomes of elections more representative of the electorate, and ensure that every vote cast matters.

### **The Four Pillars that Secure Representative Democracy**

Make Democracy More Representative	Make Voting Easier	Expand the Electorate	Improve Election Administration & Integrity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reforms that make elected officials and the legislature more representative of the electorate, and ensure that every vote cast matters.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measures that increase voter participation by reducing the barriers to voting.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measures that increase voter registration and expand the voter franchise.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Measures to ensure that every vote is counted, that fraud is prevented and elections are secure from threats foreign and domestic</li></ul>

Each of the bills I am testifying in favor of support one of these four conditions.

Testimony from others will present objective statistics that demonstrate the reforms you are considering are supported by large proportions of the electorate, regardless of party affiliation, so I will not repeat

them. The statistics should be taken as an indication that these measures are non-partisan, measures that have as their common theme that they favor voters, not one political party over another.

I would like to point to another source of validation for these voting and election reforms: the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. For nearly 250 years, the Academy has worked to bolster citizens' understanding and engagement with their government's institutions. A measure of the Academy's stature can be seen in the \$8.6 million in [funding](#) it has received from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, itself a highly respected philanthropic organization working towards a more just world.

Last year the Academy released a far-reaching [report](#), Our Common Purpose: Reinventing American Democracy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the culmination of two years of work by its Commission on the Practice of Democratic Citizenship.

The report developed six strategies and 31 recommendations for "building a fresh collective commitment to democratic citizenship, to American constitutional democracy, and to one another." Among those recommendations are most of the elements I am supporting in the bills before you today. Specifically, report recommends:

- [Universal automatic voter registration](#) to ensure that all government agencies that have contact with citizens include such registration as part of their processes. Notably, they go beyond implementing AVR in departments of motor vehicles, and I encourage you to expand HB-6578 to include all relevant state agencies as well.
- [Restoring voting rights](#) to citizens with felony convictions immediately and automatically upon their release from prison, including those on parole or probation. Restoring voting rights should be done without respect to fees owed, so as not to implement what amounts to a poll tax.
- [Expanding the number of ballot drop-off locations](#) to maximize voter participation and ensure confidence in election results. Making ballot drop boxes permanent as proposed by SB-1017 helps fulfill this objective.

Last year's killing of George Floyd led to a new surge of calls to end systemic racism and bring long overdue racial justice to Black and brown people. Making it easier to vote, expanding the voter franchise and making election outcomes more representative all serve to make it easier for communities of color to have their voices heard in government, and bring us closer to the ideals upon which this country was founded.

Some of the measures before the Committee, like restoring voting rights to parolees and counting incarcerated people where they previously lived for purposes of representation, are critical to redressing racist policies of the past that explicitly disenfranchised or diluted the representation of Black people.

If passed into law, the agenda of the GAE Committee this year will make significant strides in making it easier for more people to vote, and improve the integrity of elections, three of the four conditions for strengthening our democracy mentioned above.

I look forward to the Committee's support next year of election reforms that fulfill the fourth condition: making our democracy more representative. In particular, I urge the Committee to raise a bill to study Ranked Choice Voting. RCV, too, was included in report put forward by the Academy of Arts and Sciences, as a key recommendation to "achieve equality of voice and representation."

Thank you for your consideration.

Jonathan Perloe  
Co-founder and Steering Committee Member  
Voter Choice Connecticut